



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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TO: Members of the Virginia Congressional Delegation

FROM: Karen Remley, MD, MBA, FAAP

DATE: June 12, 2009

SUBJECT: H1N1 Influenza Update

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen Remley", followed by a vertical line and another signature.

As you may have heard reported in the media, the World Health Organization (WHO) has increased its Pandemic Alert Level to Phase 6, which is the highest level of alert. I would like to help you and your constituents understand what this means, and also update you on the Virginia Department of Health's ongoing efforts to protect public health.

This declaration by WHO is not a surprise and has been expected for some time. Phase 6 indicates that a global pandemic is underway, meaning that there are community level outbreaks occurring in other parts of the world. This new virus has spread and is now present throughout the United States and in more than 70 foreign countries.

However, it is important to understand that WHO's Phase 6 alert level has nothing to do with the severity of illness that is resulting from H1N1 infection. The actual severity of illness has remained moderate, not only in Virginia but across the United States and around the world. Among the reported 107 confirmed cases of H1N1 virus in Virginia, there have been relatively few hospitalizations and only one death. Most people who have gotten sick from the virus have recovered and now doing well. We still expect that we will see more cases, more hospitalizations and even more deaths as a result of the H1N1 virus in Virginia.

Nevertheless, the increase in the WHO alert level does send a strong message that the virus is here to stay and that our response needs to remain aggressive. VDH has been hard at work in reviewing and refining our plans and strategies, with a particular focus on ensuring preparedness for the upcoming fall and winter flu season. Our goals remain to continue to monitor where and how the virus is spreading, and to reduce the impact of the virus on public health. VDH has also been regularly sharing information with health care providers throughout Virginia. We do need to continue to reinforce our key public health messages. In particular, people with flu-like symptoms should:

- Stay at home and limit their contact with others,
- Cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze and throw the tissue in the trash, Wash their hands often with soap and water, especially after they cough or sneeze, Prevent the spread of germs by not touching their eyes, nose or mouth and
- Call their health care provider if they have questions or concerns.

Finally, we are remaining in close contact with the Centers for Disease Control in order to monitor the work that is ongoing to develop an H1N1 vaccine. We expect to receive further details concerning a potential vaccine, including how that vaccine will be made available, in the months ahead.

VDH will continue to monitor this situation and will keep you and your constituents informed. Thank you for continued support of Virginia's public health system.